

## AN OPERATOR'S MISTAKE.

The Dramatic Story of His Sudden Departure.

It Recalls a Big Wreck on the Erie Railway Which Occurred Several Years Ago—The Operator Who Was Responsible Became Crazy.

An interesting story has been handed down by the train-runners of the Erie railroad and will bear printing, as it has not before appeared in a newspaper. It relates to the big wreck some years ago near St. Mary's and the mysterious disappearance of "Mike" Brady, a big-hearted fellow and one of the best train-runners in the country.

On the night of the wreck Brady was on duty. About 12 o'clock the operator at St. Mary's reported that Conductor Hogan of extra No. 72, loaded with fruit, west bound, wanted to know if he could have 10 minutes on the time of No. 3, the east-bound night express, to make Jelico. Brady cast his eyes down upon his train sheet, which told him at a glance where every train out upon the road was. Then he looked at the clock. Jelico was 17 miles from St. Mary's. If he did not allow Hogan to use 10 minutes of the express train's time the fruit train would surely be delayed for an hour or more. All the train-runners had orders from headquarters to give the fruit trains as much show as possible, the roads being bound by contract to get them through in a specified time. So Brady sent the order asked for, which permitted the fruit train to run to Jelico for the east-bound express. He made the mistake of not sending an order first to the express.

Conductor Hogan signed the order and the operator at St. Mary's repeated it back, according to the custom. Brady "O. K.'d" it. A minute or two later the operator at St. Mary's reported the fruit train as arriving at 12:10 and leaving at 12:15. Brady jotted the time upon the train sheet and began calling the operator at Warren, three stations from Jelico, where the fruit train had orders to run. He wanted to send a duplicate of the order to the express train, so that it would wait at Jelico for the freight. The reporter at Warren did not answer and after a minute or more of steady calling Brady stopped. Train-runner Donnelly, who worked the second trick, was ill and his work had fallen on Brady and Wiers the third train-runner. And then, to make matters worse, Wiers had been taken suddenly ill early in the forenoon and Brady had been pulled out of bed to keep the road from being clogged up. He had sat at the desk since early in the morning, and, with the terrible strain of

the position, was in no condition for duty that night.

When he failed to raise the operator at Warren he dropped his head and stared at the train sheet on the desk before him. He was not asleep, but there was a temporary lapse in his mind. The express had passed Kane and the operator there had reported it. This made it absolutely necessary to get orders to Warren before it ran by that station, as there was no other telegraph station between that point and Jelico, where the freight was to meet it, open at night. Suddenly the wire opened, and tick, tick came the words: "No. 3 passed on time, Wr." "Wr." was Warren's telegraph call.

Brady straightened up in his chair, his face wearing an expression startling and wild. He reached for the key of the instrument and his fingers shook as he asked the operator at Warren to repeat the report. There had been no mistake. Brady jumped up from his chair with a wierd cry. Up and down the office he walked, wringing his hands and sobbing: "My God! What have I done? What have I done?"

The other men in the office gathered about Brady and one look at the train sheet told them the whole story. It was perfectly plain that only a miracle could prevent the heavy fruit train, running on fast time, and the flying night express from clashing together. If the operator at St. Mary's had reported Hogan's departing time correctly the two trains would meet on the flats several miles west of Jelico. But the chances were that Hogan had not pulled out of St. Mary's for five or ten minutes after he was reported. That was a common thing when the operator and trainmen were on friendly terms. It is called "stealing time." If Hogan had stolen

any time Brady knew that the two trains would meet on the curve a few miles west without a moment's warning. Nothing could save them in such an event.

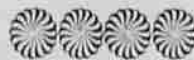
Brady had really become deranged and was talking to himself, but in tones loud enough to be heard by everyone in the room. "Look at No. 3 sailing through Jerico. Whe, she should stop! But it won't matter. Everybody knows enough to keep out of her way." Then the poor fellow subsided for a moment, but in a minute was on his feet and shouting: "Look, look, boys. There's Hogan flying around the curve just beyond the flat from the east and No. 3 from the west. Don't you see them? My God, don't you see them? They should have met at Jelico." A moment later he cried out: "Did you hear that? Did you see the fire?"

It was 12:50 o'clock. Brady was all in a heap in his chair. His companions were motionless. None dared to interrupt him for fear of violence. The sounder "ticked, ticked, but Brady paid no attention until the day operator at Jelico called. Then Brady came back to himself with a jerk and pulled the chair up to the table and answered the call. The operator at Jelico was exceedingly nervous, it was easy to tell by the way he handled his key. The message he sent was this:

"Extra west-bound freight No. 72 collided with east-bound express No. 3 on the curve just west of the big flats about 12:45. Both trains in a ditch and on fire. At least a dozen killed outright and many badly injured. Track completely blocked. 'HOGAN.'"

Brady took the message without a break. He was as firm as a rock, and not a nerve in his body shivered. He handed the message to one of his colleagues. The wild look returned to his eyes. He reached for his hat on the office pegs, and with an unearthly laugh passed out of the office. He was never seen again and not a word was ever heard of him.—Washington Star.

# WHOA!



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## W. M. Murphey.